

THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL

SPEECH

OF

HON. BENJAMIN G. HUMPHREYS

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 29, 1913



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The House had under consideration Senate joint resolution (S. J. Res. 159) approving the plan, design, and location for a Lincoln memorial.

Mr. SIMS. Mr. Speaker, I have agreed that the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. EVANS] may yield five minutes to the gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. HUMPHREYS].

The SPEAKER. The gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. HUMPHREYS] is recognized for 10 minutes.

Mr. HUMPHREYS of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I shall vote for the memorial as proposed by the committee which has had the matter in charge. [Applause.] I naturally feel a hesitancy in differing with the gentleman from Ohio, Gen. SHERWOOD, who played such a conspicuous part as a Union soldier during the war between the States. I do not wish to play the hypocrite, nor profess to have that in me which is not there. I am the son of a Confederate soldier, and it is the proudest fact of my life that my father bore an honorable part in that great struggle for local self-government. Above my desk in the House Office Building hangs a picture of Jefferson Davis. At his feet when a boy I sat as at the feet of Gamaliel and learned the story of the Confederacy and the principles for which it stood. As a young man, when I stood at the altar with her who was to be the partner of my life, Jefferson Davis stood with us, and when the ceremony ended he placed his hands upon our heads and said, "God bless you, my children."

These are memories which I cherish, Mr. Speaker, and shall hand down a rich legacy to my children.

The great war ended 50 years ago, and, thank God, the thoughts of men have broadened with the process of the suns. In 1861 my father followed the Stars and Bars and wore the gray. In 1898 I followed the Stars and Stripes and wore the blue. [Applause.] I believe that I was right in 1898, and I as surely believe that he was right in 1861.

We are here to-day engaged in a high and lofty purpose. Abraham Lincoln needs no memorial. We can add nothing to his fame, nor can we subtract one jot or tittle from it. He and Jefferson Davis, Ulysses S. Grant, and Robert E. Lee must stand before the bar of history upon the record of their deeds done in the body, and each alike must abide its judgment. I have little respect for him on either side the line who fears that final verdict.

Those were bloody years, mad with strife and sad with the suffering and travail of a weeping people; but we should not forget them. We should rather teach our children to emulate

the deeds of those who bore the brunt of battle and bowed beneath the awful burdens of State. I believe he reads his country's history with little understanding who can not catch an inspiration to patriotism from every battle field in this Republic. [Applause.] We have erected monuments throughout the North to the Union soldiers. We have erected monuments throughout the South to the Confederate soldiers; but the labor of love is not yet completed.

Mr. Speaker, I was in Quebec a few years ago and visited the Plains of Abraham. Two hundred years ago the British, under Wolfe, and the French, under Montcalm, fought on that battle field for the mastery of Canada. Upon it to-day there stands a monument erected by the descendants of those who fought under Wolfe and the descendants of those who fought under Montcalm. On it is inscribed this legend:

To Wolfe and Montcalm. Valor gave them a common death; history gave them a common fame; posterity gave them a common monument.

Speaking as far as I may speak for those whose hopes went out at Appomattox, I stand ready to vote for such a monument on every battle field of the Republic to commemorate the heroism of those who there gave up their precious lives, whether they wore the blue or whether they wore the gray. [Applause.]

I believe we are beginning such a monument here to-day, although this resolution provides for only half of it. The monument we are building is to Abraham Lincoln, the embodiment of all for which the Union soldier fought and won. Across the river, as I believe, upon the sacred soil of old Virginia, in the near future another monument will arise to the memory of Jefferson Davis, who was the embodiment of all for which the Confederate soldier fought and lost. For such a monument I believe no price could be too high; for such a purpose I believe that no money can be ill spent.

I think it ought to be beautiful. I would not stain the even virtue of our enterprise by exchanging the inspiration of the artist for the sordid commercialism of the road builder. [Applause.]

I believe it ought to be beautiful, beautiful enough to be worthy the high commission we will give it, a commission to tell the ages yet to come how soon it was that happy day rolled around, foretold in the prophetic language of Lincoln, "When the mystic chords of memory stretching from every battle field and patriot's grave to every heart and hearthstone all over this broad land would again swell the chorus of the Union when touched, as they surely have been touched, by the better angels of our nature." [Applause.]